

Iowa Native Lands
Jean Eells, Coordinator

Summary

A group of concerned citizens has created a new non-profit organization to facilitate work with native plant species in Iowa. This new group, Iowa Native Lands (INL), will provide an organizational umbrella designed to bring together groups already working with various aspects of prairies in Iowa. By providing a forum for communication, there will be increased opportunities for interaction and cooperation among Iowa prairie interests, and greater funding potential for joint projects. An additional priority will be to raise the awareness and appreciation of prairies by the public. Through coalition building, fund raising and education all Iowa prairie interests will be advanced.

Rationale

In the state of Iowa there are many different groups working with native vegetation, including government agencies (IDNR, IDOT, NRCS, CCB's, FWS), non-profit organizations (INHF, TNC, PF, IPN etc.), private companies, and individuals. This roster of prairie-oriented groups has expanded in recent years as appreciation for the environmental benefits of prairie plantings has grown. Land management practices utilizing prairie species now include:

- CRP installations, *in lieu* of alfalfa brome plantings
- buffer strips to reduce stream pollution due to runoff
- native landscaping to reduce pesticide, fertilizer and irrigation inputs
- reconstruction of prairies
- waste water filtration and urban storm water management systems
- restoration of degraded remnant native prairies
- wetlands mitigation
- roadside stabilization and vegetation
- wildlife habitat development
- biomass for energy and fiber
- research projects

While there is general consensus that this increased use of native plant species is environmentally beneficial, the variety of applications leads to considerable dichotomy within the priorities and projects actually implemented. While some differences are to be expected, in many cases there is little or no communication between prairie groups, and that fact has led to some unfortunate misunderstandings and disagreements between organizations with many allied interests. Complicating the situation further is a general public with low appreciation of the historical and environmental significance of prairies in Iowa, and a chronic shortage of funds within the conservation community.

The INL, with the support of the Prairie Rivers RC&D, will provide a neutral forum to bring the prairie interests of the state together without any loss of individual identity. It is expected that increased communication, reduced duplication of effort, and greater fund raising potential in concert with efforts to educate the public will create synergistic relationships among the member organizations.

Objectives

By increasing interaction between established prairie interests and working to provide greater funding for those groups the INL will create many opportunities. Some examples that will receive priority:

- **Education:** Develop and present information to the public on the importance of prairies, and native plant uses and benefits
- **Research:** Facilitate research to better define the importance, parameters and circumstances of local ecotype seed sources and usage
- **Consultation:** Advise state and federal agencies on policies that impact prairie plant use and diversity in Iowa and provide a forum to discuss and develop consensus with and for IDOT, IDNR, USFWS and NRCS
- **Coordination of Member Organizations:** Define and coordinate complimentary positions on management of remnants and prairie plant installations within participating organizations, work to maximize efforts among groups
- **Land Management Assistance:** Create opportunities for public/private initiatives to provide direct technical assistance to Iowa landowners for remnant preservation and use of prairie species
- **Fundraising:** Address the economic factors limiting preservation of remnants and use of prairie species in land management

Organizational Development

The initial board of 5 directors, represents the range of prairie interests in the state, and will be primarily concerned with the management and business of the organization. A technical advisory committee has been established and to date includes representatives of the major Iowa prairie interests.

Member organizations of the advisory committee include:

- governmental agencies (IDNR, NRCS, IDOT, FWS)
- non-profit organizations (IPN, TNC, INHF)
- educational institutions (ISU, UI, UNI, Drake)
- agricultural/horticultural interests (native seed producers, Iowa Grassland Alliance)

INL is ideally poised to disseminate information about prairies and appropriate land management practices. We have the expertise to educate staff from interested agencies and promote uniform and ecologically sound management practices in the process. By producing a land management manual, offering a series of training sessions, and working with the educate the general public about Iowa's native lands we can accelerate implementation of new farm bill program funds while increasing acceptance of native ecosystems.